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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: CABINET SUPPORTS OMLT TO TRAIN AFGHAN ARMY

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1 (C) Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor told visiting former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright "in confidence" November 12 that the cabinet had agreed to the deployment of an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team in Afghanistan. The decision, which must still be approved by the National Assembly, marks a qualitative step forward in Slovenia's engagement with Afghanistan. Defense Minister Jelusic told CDA in a subsequent conversation that the only caveat currently under consideration for Slovenia's OMLT concerned riot control. Other officials have said that Slovenia will insist that its forces remain in Herat, where they are well-acquainted with the political, geographic and social landscape, but that Slovenian trainers will necessarily have to go out on operations with the troops they are training. All acknowledge and accept the increased risk of casualties that such operations entail.

12. (C) Pahor told the former Secretary that there had been a tough debate⁸ over Afghanistan at the weekly cabinet meeting on November 12. The Government, he reportedly told assembled ministers, needs to do a better job explaining Afghanistan to the public. He then confided to Albright that he was troubled by the impact of the Afghan elections on Slovenian public opinion. The solution is not to send more troops,⁸ Pahor said, &it is to find a new strategy.⁸ Albright explained the Administration's ongoing policy review and pointed out that training the ANA would be part of any NATO strategy.

13. (C) COMMENT: The discussion of Afghanistan in the National Assembly is likely to be a lively one, with most of the doubters coming from within Pahor's own center-left coalition. Caveats on Slovenian forces currently under Italian command in Herat effectively combine them to base. Partly as a result, Slovenia has not suffered a single casualty in Afghanistan. Politicians live in fear of the impact the first body bag would have on this close-knit society. Add to this a steady drumbeat of negative press reporting, as well the failure of successive governments to explain adequately what Slovenian "peacekeepers" are doing in Afghanistan, and one can understand Pahor's concern about public opinion. Post is working closely with the public affairs offices of the MOD and MFA to help them develop an effective communication strategy, but much remains to be done on that front. The Slovenian military, on the other hand, is primed and ready to go. The Colorado National Guard (Slovenia's counterpart in the State Partnership Program) is standing by to train and partner with Slovenia for the first year of its OMLT.

